

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

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AMEMBASSY LOME

AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA

AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L NIAMEY 4265

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR EAID NG

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT KOUNTCHE COMMENTS ON NIGER-US RALTIONS

SUMMARY: IN LONG RAMBLING MEETING CALLED BY PRESIDENT KOUNTCHE DECEMBER 9 HE OUTLINED HIS HOPES FOR SUCCESS IN AMERICAN OIL DRILLING OPERATIONS CURRENTLY UNDER WAY AND FOR FURTHER DIALOGUE WITH US ON ROLE WE MIGHT PLAY IN NIGER'S DEVELOPMENT EFFORT. HE ALSO INDICATED HE WAS SPENDING MORE TIME ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND WOULD SHORTLY OUTLINE GENERAL THRUST OF NIGER'S FOREIGN POLICY. THIS MIGHT CONTAIN SOME SURPRISES FOR US AND HE MIGHT OCCASIONALLY CRITICIZE US POLICIES IN AFRICA, BUT HE WANTED ME TO KNOW OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS WERE GOOD AND THERE WERE NO PROBLEMS BETWEEN US AND NIGER. WE PROPOSE PULLING TOGETHER OUR VARIOUS SHORT AND LONGER TERM AID PROPOSALS INTO PACKAGE FOR DISCUSSION WITH GON EARLY NEXT YEAR. END SUMMARY.

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1. PRESIDENT KOUNTCHE CONVOKED ME MORNING DECEMBER 9 FOR WHAT TURNED OUT TO BE GENERAL DISCUSSION OF COOPERATION BWTWEEN US AND NIGER AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF NIGER'S NEEDS AS IT HOPEFULLY EMERGES FROM DEVASTATING DROUGHT.

2. DURING PRELIMINARIES, I RECALLED OUR FIRST MEETING IN JUNE, WHEN HE HAD TOLD ME THAT HE HAD LITTLE TIME FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND WOULD BE CONCENTRATING ON DOMESTIC MATTERS, AND SAID THAT I INTERPRETED HIS MANY RECENT TRIPS ABROAD TO INDICATE THAT SITUATION IN COUNTRY HAD IMPROVED AND THAT HE FELT CONDITIONS WERE STABLE ENOUGH FOR HIM TO DIRECT SOME OF HIS ENERGIES IN NEW DIRECTIONS. KOUNTCHE SAID MY INTERPRETATION WAS CORRECT. HE FOUND THIS TRAVEL USEFUL AND HE EXPECTED TO DO MORE. NEXT STOP WOULD BE BAMAKO AND THIS WOULD COMPLETE HIS "PRISE DE CONTACT" WITH ALL OF NIGER'S NEIGHBORS.

3. TURNING TO PURPOSE OF MEETING, KOUNTCHE STARTED OFF BY SAYING THERE WERE MANY AMERICANS IN NIGER -- AN AWKWARD REFERENCE TO PRESENCE IN NIGER OF NUMEROUS EXPATRIATES, MOSTLY AMERICAN, WHO ARE ENGAGED IN EXPLORATION OF MINERAL RESOURCES (ESSO) AND DRILLING OPERATIONS (TEXACO, GLOBAL-SUN OIL) -- BUT GON WELCOMED PRIVATE SECTOR AND RECOGNIZED FULLY ITS CONTRIBUTION TO DEVELOPMENT OF COUNTRY. GON HAD HIGH HOPES FOR SUCCESS OF THESE OPERATIONS. HE SAID THAT ESSO'S DEMANDS IN RECENT NEGOTIATIONS (NIAMEY 4144) HAD BEEN DIFFICULT TO MEET BECAUSE OF GUARANTEES WHICH COMPANY WANTED FOR FUTURE, BUT NEEDS OF NIGER WERE SO GREAT GON HAD LEANED OVER BACKWARDS TO BE AS ACCOMMODATING AS POSSIBLE. IT WAS TRUE THAT NIGER APPEARED TO BE RECOVERING FROM DROUGHT, BUT ITS ECONOMY, SUCH AS IT WAS, WAS SHATTERED. NORMALLY, NIAMEY COULD FEED ITSELF, BUT ITS EXPORTS AND ITS FOREIGN EXCHANGE EARNINGS WERE LIMITED TO SUCH THINGS AS PEANUTS AND CATTLE. THERE WAS NEED FOR TRANSFER OF CAPITAL TO NIGER AND BEST WAY THIS COULD BE ACHIEVED WAS THROUGH DEVELOPMENT OF NIGER'S MINERAL AND OTHER RESOURCES. HENCE, MUCH WAS RIDING ON SUCCESS OF OIL DRILLING OPERATIONS AND ESSO'S DEVELOPMENT OF URANIUM DEPOSITS.

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4. KOUNTCHE WENT ON TO SAY THAT WORLD WAS IN TRANSITIONAL STATE. THE THREE GREAT POWERS WERE EVOLVING NEW RELATIONS AMONG THEMSELVES WITH US AND CHINA DEVELOPING CONTACTS NO ONE WOULD HAVE EXPECTED A FEW YEARS AGO AND WITH US AND USSR GROPING TOWARDS A DETENTE. MEANWHILE, IN VARYING DEGREES, THESE THREE POWERS WERE INTERESTED IN AFRICA, WITH US HAVING PRIMARY IMPACT. IN FACT, WHATEVER THE FRICTIONS BETWEEN US AND ARAB WORLD AS A RESULT OF MIDDLE EAST AND

ENERGY CRISES, AFRICAN CHIEFS OF STATE KNEW FULL WELL IMPORTANCE OF ROLE WHICH UNITED STATES PLAYED IN AFRICA AND SUPPORT WHICH VARIOUS AFRICAN AND ESPECIALLY ARAB COUNTRIES RECEIVED FROM US. IN THIS CONTEXT, QUESTION AROSE AS TO EXTERNAL POLICY WHICH NIGER SHOULD FOLLOW.

5. KOUNTCHE SAID HE WAS WELL AWARE OF COMMENTS BY NEIGHBORS TO EFFECT NO ONE SEEMED TO KNOW WHERE NIGER STOOD. HE HAD TAKEN HIS TIME TO DEFINE GON'S FOREIGN POLICY BECAUSE HE WANTED TO FEEL HIS WAY AND LEARN MORE ABOUT AFRICAN AND INTERNATIONAL CURRENTS. HE WOULD SHORTLY BE MAKING A DECLARATION ON NIGER'S FOREIGN POLICY AND HE SAID HE HAD ASKED ME TO SEE HIM TO LET ME KNOW THIS WAS IN THE WORKS AND THERE MIGHT BE SOME SURPRISES, BUT THIS SHOULD NOT AFFECT OUR BASIC RELATIONS. THERE MIGHT BE TIMES WHEN IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO CRITICIZE US BECAUSE OF IMPERATIVES OF AFRICAN POLITICS. HOWEVER, WHAT WAS IMPORTANT WAS THAT THERE WERE NO DIFFERENCES IN OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS, THAT RECENT HISTORY HAD BEEN ONE OF COOPERATION AND THAT NOW THAT EMERGENCY RELIEF WAS BEHIND US, WE COULD EVOLVE AN EVEN CLOSER COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP IN DEVELOPMENT OF COUNTRY, BOTH IN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SECTORS. THIS SHOULD IN NO WAY CONFLICT WITH FRENCH-NIGERIAN TIES.

NIGER HAD CLOSE RELATIONS WITH FRANCE AND WAS TIED TO FRANCE ECONOMICALLY IN MANY WAYS. HOWEVER, IT WAS A MISTAKE FOR A COUNTRY TO BE DEPENDENT SOLELY ON ONE PARTNER. HE WANTED ME TO KNOW THAT GON WAS ENGAGED IN TALKS WITH CHINESE OVER A MORE ACTIVE ROLE WHICH THEY MIGHT PLAY IN NIGER AND HE HOPED TALKS BETWEEN NIGER AND THE US COULD BE INITIATED ALONG SAME LINES. HE IMPLIED SOVIET INTEREST IN NIGER DIDN'T AMOUNT TO MUCH. KOUNTCHE SAID HE PLANNED TO PUT SOME OF THESE IDEAS INTO A SPEECH HE WOULD MAKE AT
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THE NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATIONS DECEMBER 18. HOWEVER IT CAME OUT, HE LOOKED FOR CLOSE COOPERATION WITH THE US AND SUCCESS IN AMERICAN COMPANIES' OIL DRILLING VENTURES.

6. IN REPLY, I SAID THAT I FULLY AGREED WITH HIS VIEW REGARDING US-NIGER RELATIONS AS DEVOID OF PROBLEMS AND CHARACTERIZED BY COOPERATION IN OVERCOMING THE DROUGHT. NEXT STEP WAS TO STUDY AREAS WHERE THE US COULD ASSIST IN NIGER'S DEVELOPMENT NEEDS; IN FACT, AID CONFERENCE WAS JUST GETTING UNDERWAY IN NIAMEY TO ADDRESS SUCH PROBLEMS. WE HAD NO INTEREST IN NIGER OTHER THAN TO SEE IT DEVELOP AND SURVIVE AS AN INDEPENDENT SOVEREIGN STATE. I CONCLUDED THAT I WOULD REPORT TO WASHINGTON HIS VIEW THAT OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS WERE IN GOOD SHAPE.

7. TURNING TO SPECIFICS, KOUNTCHE SAID THAT ON SUBJECT OF RECOVERY FROM DROUGHT, MULTI-DONOR MISSION HAD IDENTIFIED SEVERAL PROBLEMS SUCH AS SHORTAGE OF STORAGE SPACE AND PROBLEMS OF OPVN LIQUIDITY AN BUILDING UP RESERVES AND IN GRAIN STABILIZATION. IF FUNDS WERE NOT AVAILABLE SOON, THE GON WOULD HAVE TO LET TRADERS TAKE OVER IN OPEN MARKET. I SAID WE WERE CURRENTLY LOOKING INTO PROBLEMS OF STORAGE AND SUPPORT FOR OPVN GRAIN PURCHASES AND WOULD BE IN TOUCH WITH HIS MINISTERS.

8. DISCUSSION THEN DIGRESSED INTO COMMENTARY BY KOUNTCHE ON PARLOUS STATE OF NIGER'S ECONOMY BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE DROUGHT AND BY FRENCH EXPLOITATION. AS DEDICATED AS HE WAS TO PRIVATE ENTERPRISE, HE WAS FRUSTRATED BY EXAMPLES OF FRENCH EXPLOITATION EVERYWHERE. WHATEVER CAPITAL WAS IMPORTED INTO COUNTRY WAS RETURNED IN PROFITS TO THE FRENCH. MOST OF THEIR ENTERPRISES WERE INEFFICIENT AND EXPENSIVE WITH MODERN FACTORIES HOUSING FIFTY YEAR OLD EQUIPMENT.

9. MEETING CONCLUDED WITH KOUNTCHE REITERATING HIS HOPES FOR SUCCESS IN OIL DRILLING OPERATIONS AND FOR JOINT EFFORT IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

10. COMMENT: NOT SURE WHAT THIS WAS ALL ABOUT. KOUNTCHE HAS BEEN TRAVELLING EXTENSIVELY OF LATE, SEEING AFRICAN
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LEADERS AND ISSUING COMMUNIQUE OCCASIONALLY CONTAINING CRITICAL REFERENCES TO US POLICIES REGARDING AFRICA. THERE HAS ALSO BEEN MUCH PRAISE LATELY OF CHINESE CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS NIGER'S DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING REPORTED \$54 MILLION INTEREST-FREE LOAN. WELL AWARE THAT US PERFORMANCE HAS SO FAR CONTRIBUTED MORE THAN PROMISES OF OTHERS, KOUNTCHE MAY HAVE WISHED TO KEEP THINGS IN BALANCE WITH A "PRISE DE CONTACT" WITH ME. IN ANY EVENT, NOW THAT DAP TEAM HAS COMPLETED ITS STUDIES AND MULTI-DONOR MISSION HAS REPORTED ON ITS FINDINGS, BELIEVE IT IS TIME TO REVIEW STATUS OF OUR PROJECTS UNDERWAY AND POSSIBLE NEW UNDERTAKINGS AS CONCRETE RESPONSE TO KOUNTCHE'S EXPRESSION OF INTEREST IN FURTHER DILOGUE WITH US ON COOPERATION.
END COMMENT.HECK

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